

From: Wilhoit, Gene - Commissioner of Education
Sent: Monday, July 29, 2002 3:29 PM
To: All State Supt
Cc: KDE Associate Commissioner's; KDE Planning Committee; Gross, Lisa - OC; Proctor, Audrey - Extended Learning Services
Subject: Primary Programs

Dear Superintendents:

During the last two years, I have had the opportunity to visit many Primary Programs in elementary schools throughout the Commonwealth. I have observed models of educational delivery and I have noticed some areas of concern. The purpose of this letter is to raise these issues and to ask that you do what you can to make sure your elementary principals are implementing the primary program in a way that maximizes learning for all of the children in their charge. Although our goal of proficiency is an extremely ambitious goal, with the kind of commitment and effort I have witnessed, I believe the goal is achievable for all Kentucky schools.

After reviewing with staff the data reported and collected in the Primary Demographic Survey (annual report) and after fielding a number of parent concerns, I have become increasingly aware of our need to revisit and clarify the proper implementation of Kentucky's required Primary Program. The Kentucky Revised Statute (KRS 156.160) created the ungraded Primary Program in all schools containing what had formerly been grades K - 3. Essentially, under this legislation, the critical attributes were established: **continuous progress, developmentally appropriate educational practices, multiage and multiability classrooms, authentic assessment, qualitative reporting methods, professional teamwork, and positive parent involvement.**

An analysis of the Primary Demographic Survey reveals that over the past few years certain patterns of implementation of the ungraded Primary Program have emerged which cause me to pause. The demographic data indicate:

- An increasing number of children are requiring an additional year (5th year) in the Primary Program (1999-2000/ 4,745 students, 2000-2001/ 5,601 students).
- An extremely high percentage of young children are being retained prior to their exiting year in Primary.
- *Benchmarks and Exit Criteria* are being used in the earliest years by many to determine student placements, assignments, promotions, and retentions.
- 50% of Kentucky's Elementary Schools have elected to implement the Ungraded Primary Program using a traditional graded structure.
- A significant number of schools do not have specific Primary Program policies or total school policies that include reference to the critical attributes in Kentucky Revised Statue (KRS 158.031).

- Some schools are not including families in every aspect of each student's educational growth and development, therefore creating a void in the establishment of mutual agreement and consensus related to "what is in the best interest of the child".
- We see too few schools which reflect a strong understanding of overall characteristics that merit an exemplary or a fully implemented primary program.

As you know, the school council has the responsibility to develop policy to implement its Primary Program. In 1998 the General Assembly attached language to the budget bill allowing flexibility to individual councils and schools to determine the organization of its Ungraded Primary Program including the extent to which multiage groupings are utilized to implement the critical attributes. This move to create greater flexibility was important and needed. It moved us from an emphasis on specific parts to one of doing what is necessary to meet the individual needs of students. The language did not discontinue the seven attributes that are critical to the implementation of the program. Under the umbrella of flexibility to design programs, the SBDM Council in each school should continue, through school policy and planning, to structure its Ungraded Primary Program within statutory requirements to meet the individual needs of each student.

Kentucky Revised Statutes (KRS 156.010 and KRS 156.210) require that the Commissioner of Education both monitor and enforce state laws and regulation; therefore, I request that you raise this issue with your elementary principals and ask them to reexamine and recommit to the vision of appropriateness and quality of all of Kentucky's Primary Programs. All of us in Kentucky are focused on improved student achievement and, therefore, our work will be more strategic and targeted to help schools and districts reach this goal. This performance expectation will require all of us to adjust, stretch, grow and implement the primary program legal requirements to ensure the continuous progress of every student and family in your building. If you have questions, or points of view on this issue, please feel free to contact me.